

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity
6 August, AD 2017
St. Matthew 7:15-23
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I can hand you the most beautiful apple you have ever seen, but if it is filled with rot and disease on the inside, it will make you sick at least and may even kill you if you eat it. And what a fool a person would be who eats the fruit knowing full-well that it was tainted with even a drop of deadly poison. And what loveless wretches we would be if we knew the apple was poisoned and didn't tell anyone!

So why do we so readily sit by in silence when God's Word is corrupted by false preachers who poison the Gospel with the Law, who rob consciences in any way of the full assurance of Christ's atoning death? Why are we content in matters of eternal life and death to sit by while wolves in sheep's clothing fill our neighbor's, our loved one's, and even our own ears with deadly poison. There is nothing more loveless that we could ever do, no matter how good the intention. We should never comfort ourselves by saying "Well, at least I/we/they go to church". It's not about going or not going to church. It doesn't do any good to say "Well, at least I was eating fruit" if that fruit is filled with deadly poison. It doesn't matter how good the apple tastes. Poison is still poison. The only thing that saves anyone and everyone is the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God who has born the sins of the whole world. If that isn't preached, if consciences terrified by their guilt are fed the lie that the certainty of their salvation lies in their own work, their own decision, their own commitment to God, there can never be hope or peace. What help could ever be found by looking in the very place that is the source of our problems - ourselves?

False preaching and those who preach it are dangerous. They lead people away from Jesus and down an impossible road of self-salvation that only leads to despair and eternal destruction. That is why Jesus sounds the alarm and calls false preachers exactly what they are - murderers of souls, peddlers of rotten, deadly fruit. Jesus doesn't issue empty warnings. And while false preachers themselves receive countless warnings throughout Scripture, today Jesus is warning those who would listen to these pious-looking, smooth-talking wolves. Don't! Run from them and warn others of

the danger. Whether they are standing in a pulpit, walking around on a stage, or even residing within your own heart, cast them away from your presence. Don't toy with lies and tempt Satan. Don't think as Adam and Even did, that you are strong enough to sift through and safely pick out the occasional nugget of truth from among all the lies because the lies are buried right in among the truth. Seek out nothing less than the purely preached Word of God because the pure Word of God is life and peace and salvation. It alone can soothe terrified consciences. It alone can bring hope in the midst of the darkest hours of despair. It alone can forgive sins, raise the dead to life, and turn God's enemies into His children. And that is why God preserves His Word for you in its purity - because He wants you and every other sinner to receive the abundance of it's divine blessings.

But the Gospel is not a matter of personal preference. There is the one true Gospel that saves and then there are perversions of that Gospel which deceive and confuse, which make the Gospel conditional, which reject the Means of Grace and instead direct people to look inward for assurance. That simply is not the Gospel no matter how many times you insert the words "Jesus" or "God". That isn't what God said. It is a lie sent by the father of lies who poisoned the ears of our first parents with his smooth talking and slick presentation and brought all of humanity into bondage. All false preachers have this in common - they will never leave you certain of your salvation, content with the work of Christ, because they would all have you believe that there remains something for you to contribute - whether that is works of penance or giving your life to Christ or any other such thing. And those who preach such things in Jesus' Name will answer for misusing His Name, for telling lies and deceiving even one soul under the cloak of our Lord's Name. God very clearly and without exception says in Exodus 20 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." And neither will our Lord hold guiltless those who listen to false preachers and encourage others to do the same.

You can be sure that Satan is filling the world with his false preachers in order to lead you astray. Your ears must always be on guard because even our own sinful flesh longs for preachers who will stroke our egos and tell us that God is fine with the sins of our choosing. But, Beloved, God has given you His Word, He has spoken to us by His Son so that we may know the truth and be saved by it. In His great mercy, God has preserved the good fruit of pure preaching among us so that we might rejoice in the

salvation He has won for us. He doesn't want you to have any doubt that Jesus has done everything necessary to save you. He doesn't want you to think that there remains more for you to do. It is finished. He wants you to have every certainty that in the waters of Holy Baptism all your guilt was forever washed away from you. He gives you the very Body and Blood which were offered in payment for your sins because He wants to remove all doubt that it was your sins that He paid for on the cross.

God wants you to know and believe these things because He wants you to take refuge in His saving work on your behalf. He wants you to confidently say "I am sure of my salvation because God's only Son has died for me and shed His Blood for me. There may be nothing but sin in me. But there is nothing but grace and forgiveness in Jesus. He is sufficient." He wants you only to rest in the arms of Jesus, the very embodiment of the true Gospel.

Dear children of God, your Father has given you His Word so that you can judge the fruit of preachers and recognize the poison in their words. Do not despise that Word but take it up at every turn. Arm yourselves with it against all of the devil's false preachers and listen only the voice of Jesus who proclaims to you righteousness and life and peace through His cross.

In the Name of +Jesus.